

**Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol ar Anabledd a Chyflogaeth**

**This response was submitted to the Equality and Social Justice Committee consultation on Disability and Employment**

**DE14**

**Ymateb gan: Yr Athro Daiga Kamerāde, Yr Athro Andrew Clark, Dr Christine Goodall, Christine Parker, Dr Christina Vasilica and John Yuen | Response from: Professor Daiga Kamerāde, Professor Andrew Clark, Dr Christine Goodall, Christine Parker, Dr Christina Vasilica and John Yuen**

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Welsh Parliament

Social and Justice Committee Inquiry

Disability Employment and Payment Gap

**Written evidence submitted by Prof  
Daiga Kamerāde, Prof Andrew Clark, Dr  
Christine Goodall, Christine Parker, Dr  
Christina Vasilica and John Yuen**

University of Salford/University of  
Greenwich/ HEAR Equality and Human  
Rights Network

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1. This written evidence is submitted by Prof. Daiga Kamerāde (University of Salford&ESRC Digital Futures Research Centre, University of Sussex) and Prof. Andrew Clark (University of Greenwich), Dr Christine Goodall (HEAR Equality and Human Rights Network), Christine Parker, Dr Christina Vasilica, and John Yuen (all from the University of Salford). We are a multi-disciplinary research team that includes experts in social sciences, disability research, vocational rehabilitation, and digital engagement.
2. Contact: Prof. Daiga Kamerāde, Professor in Work and Wellbeing, Director of the Centre for Research on Inclusive Society, School of Health and Society, University of Salford; Associate Fellow, ESRC Digital Futures Research Centre, University of Sussex; Associate Fellow, Centre for Business Research, University of Cambridge. E-mail: [REDACTED]
3. In addition to our written response, we are happy to provide any supplementary information and offer oral evidence if needed.
4. The information provided in this submission is drawn from the research project 'Digitvol: Digital Inclusion of Disabled Adults in On- and Offline Voluntary Work' (funded by the Innovation Fund, part of the ESRC Digital Futures Research Centre) and from our subject expertise.
5. The project ran from November 2023 to October 2024 and involved analysing data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) for 2018 to 2023, based on a nationally representative sample of nearly 30,000 adults, 32% of whom self-identified as disabled. We also analysed two Time Well Spent Surveys (2019 and 2023) provided by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, with samples of around 10,000 and 7,000 disabled adults, respectively, 34% of whom reported a disability. Additionally, we interviewed 18 disabled adults residing primarily in northwest or southeast England. The interviews covered six topics: an overview of volunteering experiences; experiences with and access to digital tools related to volunteering; examples of positive and challenging experiences; advice for others; training needs; and the links between volunteering, employment, and wellbeing.
6. Our project was co-produced in collaboration with three experts by experience—disabled adults with volunteering experience—and with the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), the British Association of Brain Injury and Complex Case Management (BABICM), the Vocational Rehabilitation Association (VRA), and the Case Management Society (CMSUK).

## Call for Evidence:

This written submission addresses the following key question in the call for evidence:

*'What actions would support those who are currently unable to work to access voluntary opportunities (which could lead to future work opportunities).'*

We recommend:

1. **Extend the Access to Work<sup>1</sup> scheme** to provide support for disabled individuals engaging in voluntary work, not just paid work. Currently, the scheme offers financial assistance for specialist equipment, assistive software, mental health support, and workplace adjustments but does not apply to voluntary work. This extension would enable a larger number of disabled people, especially those from lower-income households, to have equal opportunities to contribute to and benefit from voluntary activities, enhancing their chances of finding paid work.

**Evidence:** Our project found that the lack of Access to Work support for voluntary work creates a significant barrier for disabled adults. Many disabled people, particularly those from lower-income households, cannot afford the necessary adjustments to participate in volunteering. This issue was highlighted by both disabled adults and vocational rehabilitation experts who assist disabled individuals in returning to employment.

2. **Enhance digital access and inclusion of disabled people.** Implement government-funded programmes to provide subsidised laptops, tablets, and internet connections to disabled individuals seeking to volunteer or find paid work. Prioritise low-income households, those with low education levels, older adults and social benefit recipients. Develop tailored digital skills training covering essential tasks like internet browsing, email, and social media. It is essential that this support includes one-to-one personal **ongoing** assistance **tailored to the specific needs of each disabled person**. This will empower disabled adults to participate in volunteering and paid work.

**Evidence.** Widespread digitalisation of everyday life, including volunteering and employment, means that everyone needs access to the Internet and the ability to use it effectively. Voluntary sector organisations increasingly use digital technologies for recruitment, training, management, and communication with volunteers. While this offers new opportunities for disabled adults, such as reduced stress and fatigue through online volunteering, it also creates barriers. Our survey data analysis shows that in

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<sup>1</sup> Access to Work: [get support if you have a disability or health condition: What Access to Work is](https://www.gov.uk/get-support-if-you-have-a-disability-or-health-condition/what-access-to-work-is) - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk))

the UK, nearly one million disabled adults do not have internet access at home, 1.4 million do not use the internet, and about two million do not own a smartphone or computer. This results in a significant digital disability gap compared to non-disabled adults. Disabled adults are less likely to use the internet for essential tasks like browsing, email, and online banking, which are crucial for volunteering and paid work. This digital divide is further exacerbated for disabled people who belong to already disadvantaged groups, such as older adults, those with low incomes, benefit recipients, renters, individuals with lower education levels, and those living alone, who face even greater challenges in accessing and using digital technologies. Our research also highlights the importance of personal ongoing support tailored to the specific needs of each disabled adult. The complexity of impairments often requires customised solutions, and disabled adults have emphasised the critical need for continuous support to address issues as they arise and adapt to changing circumstances.

3. **Foster collaborative partnerships** between government agencies, voluntary sector organisations, disability advocacy organisations, disabled adults, and tech companies to co-create solutions that bridge the digital divide for disabled adults. Collaborative efforts should focus on integrating digital inclusion with broader socioeconomic support services.

**Evidence.** Our survey data analysis and interviews indicate that digital inclusion in volunteering is closely linked to overall digital inclusion in other areas of life. The same devices, technologies, social support, and skills used in employment and other domains are often applied to volunteering.

4. **Work with disabled communities to develop public awareness raising campaigns** that highlight the digital divide, along with signposting to help and support to reduce disadvantage

**Evidence:** Our interviews with disabled adults revealed that their digital inclusion in volunteering is often hindered by a lack of understanding about the barriers they face. Many perceive that there is an assumption everyone, including disabled individuals, knows how to use technology, leading to insufficient support or training from voluntary sector organisations. This over-reliance on technology complicates volunteer experiences, especially when IT systems or support are inaccessible or inadequate for disabled people.

5. **Engage Disabled Communities in Policy Development:** Establish ongoing consultation mechanisms with disabled people to ensure that policies and programmes reflect their lived experiences and needs. This should include regular feedback loops to adapt and improve services.

**Evidence:** Inclusive policy development, which actively engages disabled adults, leads to more effective and relevant policies that accurately reflect their lived experiences and needs<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Boyle, D., & Harris, M. (2009). The challenge of co-production. London;new.economics.foundation, 12(18).